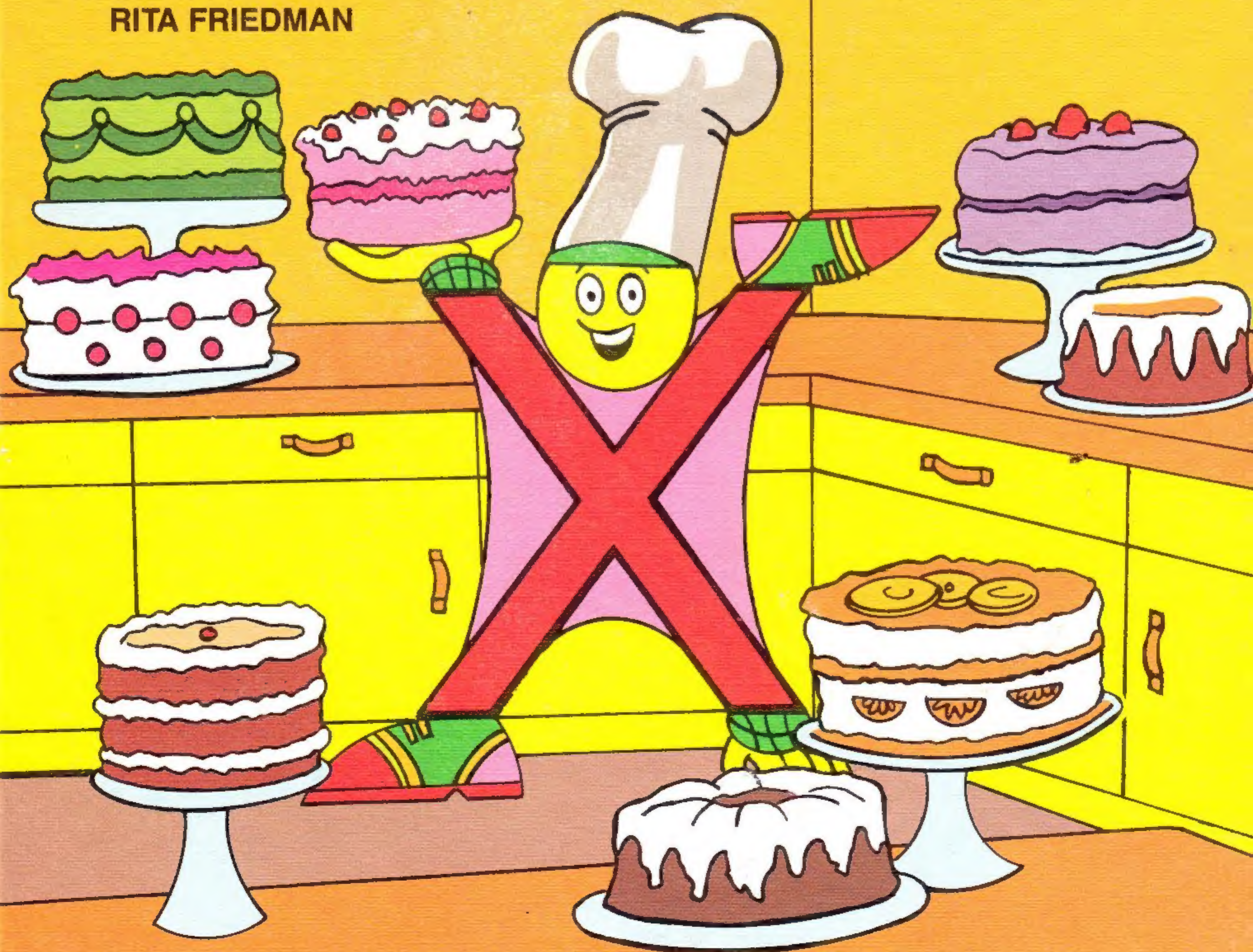


The Inimitable

Mr. X

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Mr. X always has problems following directions.
One day, his friend X-Andrea thinks of a way to help him.
She brings a box of cake mix to his house.

“Mr. X, would you like to bake a cake?” asks X-Andrea.
“Can I bake a cake all by myself?” asks Mr. X.
“If you follow the directions on this box,”
says X-Andrea, “it will be easy.
You must remember not to change anything.”
“I will remember,” says Mr. X.
“Good,” says X-Andrea.
“I will telephone you later.”



Mr. X looks at himself in the mirror.
“I cannot bake a cake
unless I look like a baker,” he says.
Mr. X hurries to the store.
“I will buy this baker’s tall white hat,” he says.
“I will buy this baker’s big white apron.
Next, I need some baking things.
I will buy these baking pans, mixing bowls,
and rolling pins.
All these things will make me a fine baker.”



Mr. X goes home.
He puts on his tall white hat.
He puts on his big white apron.
He covers his counter with baking pans,
mixing bowls, and rolling pins.
He looks in the mirror.
“Now I look like a baker,” smiles Mr. X.
“I will surely bake a fine cake.”



Mr. X picks up the box of cake mix.
He begins to read the directions.
“I always have trouble following directions,” he says.
“X-Andrea said I must remember
not to change anything.
I can follow the first direction.
I just empty the cake mix into a bowl.
But the next direction is strange.
I have to put an egg into the bowl.
What will happen to the eggshell?
I wonder if it will melt?”



“I don’t understand,” sighs Mr. X, “but I’ll do it. I promised not to change anything.”

The next direction is even more confusing to Mr. X. He reads, “Put a teaspoon of water into the bowl.” Mr. X sighs again.

“I have water, but I do not have a special spoon for tea,” he says.

“I do not have time to buy one. I will have to make one.”



Mr. X opens his kitchen cabinet.
He finds a tea bag.
He finds a spoon.
“I will tie the tea bag around the spoon,” he says.
“There, I made a teaspoon,” says Mr. X proudly.
“Now I can put it into the bowl with the cake mix,
the egg, and the water.
This time I am certainly following the directions.
I am not changing anything.
But I never knew all the strange things
bakers use to make a cake.”



The next direction puzzles Mr. X the most.
He reads, "Put half a cup of milk into the bowl."
"I have milk," says Mr. X.
"But all my cups are whole.
I did not know the store sells half a cup.
I will have to break one of my cups.
I promised to follow the directions.
I cannot change anything."



Suddenly, Mr. X's telephone rings.

It is X-Andrea.

"Mr. X, are you following the directions?" she asks.

"Oh, yes," says Mr. X.

"I put an egg into the bowl.

I hope the shell melts.

I tied a tea bag to a spoon to make a teaspoon.

I put it in the bowl.

I am following the directions."

X-Andrea is so surprised, she cannot speak.



"I have one problem," continues Mr. X.
"I did not buy half a cup.
But I will break one of my whole cups into two pieces.
Then I will put one piece into the bowl."
X-Andrea cannot believe what she is hearing.
"Please, Mr. X," she says.
"Do not put anything else into the bowl
until I get to your house."



Mr. X. hangs up the telephone.
“X-Andrea will be proud of me,” he says.
“This time I am following the directions.
I will make icing for my cake while I wait for her.”
Mr. X opens the freezer door.
He takes out a tray of ice cubes.
Before he can put the tray on the counter,
the doorbell rings.
It is X-Andrea.
She is carrying a large cake box.



“X-Andrea,” says Mr. X,
“will you teach me how to make pink ice cubes?”
“Why do you want pink ice cubes?” asks X-Andrea.
“I want pink icing for my cake,” says Mr. X.
X-Andrea shakes her head.
She thinks, “Only Mr. X would use a tea bag
to make a teaspoon.
Only Mr. X would use ice cubes to make icing.
What is wrong?” X-Andrea asks herself.
“Why can’t Mr. X follow directions?”



X-Andrea looks at Mr. X's mixing bowl.
She thinks about each thing Mr. X has put into it.
Suddenly she knows what is wrong.
"This mess is my fault," she thinks.
"Mr. X tried to follow the directions,
but he could not.
He did not understand the directions.
People cannot follow directions
they do not understand.
Poor Mr. X.
I cannot let him bake this cake.
What can I do?"



X-Andrea thinks of a plan.
She must be careful not to hurt Mr. X's feelings.
"Mr. X," she says, "will you help me?"
"Of course," answers Mr. X.
"I can make pink ice cubes later."
"I am worried," says X-Andrea.
"If you bake a cake today,
I will have no one to eat the cake I bought."
X-Andrea opens her cake box.



Mr. X looks at the cake.
He sees whipped cream, cherries, and pink icing.
He looks at his mixing bowl.
He sees an egg with a shell.
He sees a spoon with a tea bag.
Mr. X looks at the dripping ice tray in his hand.
He takes off his tall white hat.
He sits down.
X-Andrea cuts a slice of cake.





Mr. X never baked his cake that day.
However, he learned to be a great baker.
X-Andrea helped him understand baking directions.
Then he was able to follow them.
Now he makes many cakes all by himself.